

Routes for digestate products in Flanders

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Co-fermentation of manure, organic-biological waste streams and energy crops results in the production of green energy and digestate. Today, in Flanders, digestate products from co-fermentation of animal manure with plant based input streams are fully allocated the status of 'animal manure'. The plant based input streams are legally regarded animal manure after co-fermentation. Since part of this digestate is being spread on Flemish agricultural land, farmers have raised concerns about whether this product competes with the existing nutrient surplus in Flanders.

Next to application on agricultural land, digestate products are also exported or processed in biological treatment plants. Ultimately 16% of the nitrogen in digestate products is deposited on Flemish agricultural land under the 'animal manure' status and another 15% under 'other manure' status. Of the phosphate present, 19% is deposited on Flemish agricultural land. The other nutrients are exported or processed through nitrification/denitrification (N/D) and do not give rise to increasing the nutrient surplus in Flanders. Rather, export and N/D contribute to reduction of the Flemish nutrient surplus.

When the amount of nutrients in the input streams of the co-fermentation sector are compared with the amount of nutrients in co-fermentation products applied on Flemish agricultural land, it is clear that co-fermentation serves as a net reducer of both nitrogen (animal manure) and phosphate (animal and other manure). This net reduction of nutrients is partly achieved by investments such as in-house biological processing or drying installations.